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Discussion Session on Professional
Values in the CIA

One of the objectives of the Center for the Study of Intelligence is to contribute to the growth and stimulation of professionalism in the Agency. Hopefully, the general research and study program of the Center will aid in this process, but it may also be possible to make a contribution through a more direct look at the subject. Most authorities who have given thought to the nature and essence of "professionalism" suggest that one criteria of the professional is a common, or at least a partially shared set of values, both personal and institutional, with his associates.

Our thought was that we might take a tentative impressionistic look at professional values in the Agency by convening a small group of Agency officers and spending a couple of hours talking about the subject, especially whether there are any "values" unique to CIA. Our objective in part was to determine whether the subject warranted further consideration, perhaps in a bit more formal and larger discussion format or in a research study. We made no effort to assure that a representative of each Directorate was present--which in hindsight proved a mistake, since most of those present felt there were probably significant differences in values

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between directorates,* especially between officers engaged in analysis and operations. None of those present had extensive experience with the operations process (see list of discussants attached).

There is, of course, an immediate difficulty in defining the nature of a "value." In the course of the discussion, it was decided for our purposes to regard a value as a concept identified by a set of attitudes defining what one holds to be an important principle to motivate and guide one's behavior. At the outset of the discussion, several possible values of significance in the Agency were broached for consideration:

objectivity
concern with confidentiality
political neutrality
esprit de corps
progressiveness and flexibility

The discussion tended to focus on three of these: objectivity, integrity, and political neutrality. There was, of course, no objection to the importance of objectivity as a

*This feeling has some support in data collected on Agency groups using a measurement device called the Allport-Vernon-Lindsey Study of Values. These data suggest that analysts place relatively higher value on the pursuit of objective truth than either operators, who are more attuned to power relationships between people, or administrators and support personnel, who tend to value more highly the discovery of "what works" in a practical sense in the solution of problems and achievement of goals.

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fundamental and important value throughout the Agency, although the opinion was expressed that there were doubtless meaningful variations in the ways officers tended to see their objectivity. For example, some officers may have joined the Agency partly out of a concern with opposing the Communist threat and might at times see the Agency's posture against this menace as more important than strict objectivity in analysis or collection.

Several of the discussants questioned political neutrality as a common value, or certainly as a value unique in the intelligence business. The difficulty here was an officer's personal, political point of view. For some, this personal point of view was of considerable importance as a motivation in their actions, although it was felt that most officers could, at an appropriate point, rise above their personal views and that they valued their ability to cooperate and participate, regardless of their personal outlook. In fact, some of the group felt that the right to dissent, and the willingness to tolerate it, was an important basic value in the Agency, shared up and down the chain of command, and not present in the same way in other organizations.

Discussion along this line led the group to agree, with some minority dissent, that a key Agency value was one that might be expressed as organizational loyalty. This involves

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a feeling among Agency people that an officer can promote or support a point of view to the best of his ability right to the top of the Agency, but that if he is overruled, he follows along with the majority and does not resort to resignation, leaks to the press, etc. to support his position. In view of the Adams and Marchetti cases, it would be interesting to know whether this point of view is widely shared in the Agency.

There was also general agreement that an important motivating factor for Agency officers, which some held to be in the nature of a value, was the sense of being the best in the business, perhaps a feeling of elitism. This tended to enhance and reinforce the sense of professionalism in the CIA and in a way represents a kind of crowning attitude of Agency officers who believe they hold to high values and standards. Although the group did not discuss them in detail, some of these additional standards or values would be: open-mindedness; innovativeness; readiness to go anywhere, work at any time needed; and commitment to excellence.

Other issues touched upon but not explored in depth were:

1. The question of the extent to which values of Agency professionals are "brought in," pre-existing in the people we recruit, vs. the extent to which they are shaped and changed by the organization;

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2. The distinction, if any, which might be made between professional values and organizational values, and possible conflicts between them;
3. The process by which values are shaped, articulated, and transmitted within the organization.

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